

# What Our Kids Would Tell Us About Parenting And Divorce (If We Asked)

June 12, 2013 by [Kate Scharff](#)

If you're like most divorcing parents, you're looking for advice.

You know that the ways you and your ex relate to each other will have a direct impact on your kids' post-split adjustment. So you're soliciting reading recommendations, polling friends about their co-parenting experiences, maybe consulting a divorce professional. And that's all great– the more educated you can be about how to help your family through this difficult phase, the better.

But your best resource lives in your house.

As a therapist, I've worked with hundreds of children from divorcing families. These kids have run the gamut from pre-schoolers to young adults. Some have come from high-conflict homes in which they've been exposed to horrific fighting, others from homes in which parents have done a good job of keeping acrimony to a minimum.

But all they have two things in common:

- *They have more wisdom to share on the topic of parenting during divorce than you'll find in any book or from any divorce expert, and...*
- *They want us to know what they know.*

The following is a list of the most common and important pearls of wisdom that, over the years, I've heard from children of divorce. Writing it has been a humbling reminder: When it comes to our kids, we should be doing less telling and more asking.

## **The Divorced Kids' Manifesto**

- Don't criticize each other in front of us. Rolling your eyes counts. After a few years we might stop telling you how much we hate it. We never stop hating it. And by the way– we overhear about ninety-five percent of your phone conversations.
- If we tell you something bad that happened at the other parent's house, just listen. Maybe try to be supportive or help us figure out how to cope. We hate it when you have a conniption and run to the phone. Plus, we can tell when you're secretly psyched that it's not all paradise "over there." That sucks, too.

- We *know* it's hard to be a single parent. We already feel bad about it. So don't hit us over the head with it every time we groan about unloading the dishwasher. If you want us to help out more, just say so. But we'll still groan, because we're kids.
- Don't tell us horror stories about your divorce. We can't handle hearing about the cheating and the money shenanigans and that adult business.
- There might be times when we want to spend more time with one of you than the other. Don't take it personally. We'll probably feel differently next month.
- We're not objects for you to lug around. When you say stuff to each other like "Hey, pick-up was at two, where were you?" it makes us feel like a junky old couch you left on the curb for the Salvation Army.
- Don't put on puppy-dog eyes and act rejected when we're missing our other parent. If we had a magic wand we'd be with both of you all the time. Anyway, it's not like we have an "affection allowance" and if we spend too much on one of you we won't have enough left for the other.
- We can't help that our other parent loves *us* but not *you*. We wish it wasn't like that. Be happy for us, not sorry for yourself.
- It's really hard to play soccer when the two of you are on the sidelines shooting dirty looks at each other or jockeying over who is more *in* with the other spectating parents. And we'd rather not *have* a birthday party than have one where we have to worry that the tension between you might cause the room to combust.
- Don't trash each other to our friends' parents. Our friends always hear the stories, then they gossip about us. It feels awful. It also makes *you* look kinda mean and crazy, which is embarrassing.
- If we don't feel like talking to you on the phone, it doesn't mean we don't love you or that our other parent is discouraging us. It just means we're on Facebook or watching a movie or something. Plus, if you push too hard the calls start to feel more like a burden than a comfort. Sometimes too much contact makes us miss you *more*, so let us set the pace.
- We *hate* feeling we have no control over our lives. If we tell you that having dinner with Mom on Monday nights makes it impossible to get our homework done, listen to us. But don't change things around if you're just gonna give us a hard time about it.
- Don't force us to spend time with your new girlfriend or boyfriend (or their kids!), or make us pretend we like them if we don't. And if you get married again, don't pretend a stepparent is the same as a parent. One isn't better or worse; they're just different.
- Spend some one-on-one time with us once in a while.

- Don't rush to scrub your house of photos of the other parent like the place is suddenly a hazmat zone. At least leave some of the family albums alone, or give us an old wedding photo to keep in our bedroom.
- We hate, hate, *hate* it when you complain about money. And don't tell us to "get Dad to pay for summer camp." Talk to him yourself.
- Figure out schedule changes yourselves, don't pull us into it. And don't offer to do something cool with us on our other parent's time without checking with them first. Otherwise the info will get out too soon, and one of you will freak out. Then the other will freak out. Fun times.
- If you buy us clothes or toys, don't make a federal case about us keeping them at *your* house. If we have to track stuff that carefully or leave it behind when we go, it doesn't feel like *our* stuff. If there's something special, like dressy clothes or expensive toys, let us know right away that you want them to stay put— not when we're on our way out the door.
- If we forget our biology book or baseball glove once in a while, cut us some slack. How would you like to live in two places and have to constantly wonder "What ten things will I need next week?" Kids aren't famous for remembering that stuff anyway.
- Don't compare standards of living between the houses. Believe it or not, we don't care who drives a new Lexus and who drives a used Honda— as long as you drive us to the mall!
- Still, we're not idiots: If someone offers to buy us an iPhone, we're gonna take it. So if one of you thinks the other is trying to "buy" us, take it up with *them*. Better yet, leave it alone.
- When you get divorced, don't only pay attention to the one of us who acts upset. The quiet ones are having a rough time, too.
- We know you're interested, but don't grill us about the time we're away from you. There's a big difference between asking if we had a nice weekend and asking if Dad fed us "crap" for dinner again.
- Our friends with married parents are sick of watching the old wedding videos and hearing stories about the day they were born. Sometimes it feels like *we* didn't come from anywhere. We adore it when you share old memories of each other. And if you use a tone of voice that says "we used to love each other and we loved having *you*," well... you have no idea.

- See more at: <http://www.katescharff.com/what-our-kids-would-tell-us-about-parenting-and-divorce-if-we-asked/#sthash.uFj26xZh.B0T4til5.dpuf>